

Erosion of Morale Is Seen Among FBI Rank and File

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By John M. Goshko
Washington Post Staff Writer

Continuing disclosures of past FBI abuses and charges of financial wrong doing within the bureau reportedly are causing what some sources call "a fresh and devastating erosion of morale" among the FBI's 8,500 agents.

These sources say that the morale problem has not yet affected the FBI's ability to perform its myriad, day-to-day federal law enforcement functions.

But, they add, the growing sense of discouragement among rank-and-file bureau personnel is causing new doubts about the long-range outlook for Director Clarence M. Kelley's struggle to repair the FBI's tattered public image and restore its esprit de corps.

The dissatisfaction springs from several causes. Some of it can be traced to simple bread-and-butter issues such as the Ford administration's desire to drastically cut the overtime now paid to FBI agents for the extra hours they devote to continuing investigations.

Of greater importance though are some internal problems that affect different groups within the FBI in different ways and that threaten to open a possible generation gap among the agents.

Many younger agents are becoming openly restive over Kelley's gradualist approach to changing the bureau. They want the director to move faster in purging the FBI's top echelons of all executives who are identified with memories of the

bureau as it was in the days of J. Edgar Hoover.

Among veteran agents though, there is a feeling that Kelley has gone too far in apologizing for the excesses committed during Hoover's last years as director. To them, Kelley's posture of contrition and conciliation toward the FBI's critics reflects adversely on their own careers.

According to sources within the bureau, there are two issues, in particular, that illustrate how these conflicting attitudes are tugging at the fabric of FBI morale. They are:

- An investigation ordered by the Justice Department into allegations of improper financial dealings between past—and possibly present—

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FBI officials and suppliers of equipment to the bureau.

- A decision by Attorney General Edward H. Levi to notify several hundred persons that they were targets of past FBI harassment campaigns to disrupt militant political groups of the right and left.

The probe of possible financial corruption stems from testimony before the Senate intelligence committee last October that the FBI had been using a Washington firm, U.S. Recording Co., as a front through which it channeled its purchases of electronic eavesdropping equipment in order to disguise the source and nature of the equipment.

Joseph Tait, the president of U.S. Recording, was a close friend of John P. Mohr, a onetime power in the FBI, and through him was well acquainted with several other men who now hold key positions in the bureau's administration.

These relationships triggered question about whether Tait's firm had enjoyed

an unfair edge in obtaining the FBI's business or had been allowed to charge unreasonably high markups for its services. Similarly, there were questions about whether anyone in the FBI had received kickbacks or favors from U.S. Recording.

An internal investigation ordered by Kelley and carried out by the FBI's Inspection Division found no evidence of illegal acts. But the probe's results were rejected by the Justice Department as unsatisfactory, and Levi ordered Kelley to institute a much deeper and more thorough inquiry.

The results of this new investigation probably will not be known for several months. But, the very fact that it was considered necessary is known to have had a shattering effect on morale in the FBI, which has not been troubled by a major financial corruption scandal since its reorganization by Hoover in the 1920s.

Bureau sources say that younger agents, in particular, regarded Levi's rejection of the initial probe's findings as a stinging rebuke to the bureau's top-ranking executives.

"To the younger guys, it

seemed as though Justice was saying, 'This is a white-wash,'" one source noted. "And that just fueled the feeling that the old-guard execs are running a mutual protection association and have to be pushed out before outsiders will believe that the bureau can police itself again."

This feeling reportedly is very strong in the FBI's lower ranks, even though no one there really knows what the corruption will eventually disclose. In fact, the sources say, most people in the FBI seem to believe that the probe will not find any evidence of illegal acts—of at least none involving persons currently active in the bureau.

Supporting this belief, the sources add, is lingering faith that the FBI's stern code of personal conduct and the rigorous mechan-

isms established by Hoover to enforce this code would have deterred any systematic corruption.

Many agents also say that they think investigators will find it difficult to pinpoint instances of actual lawbreaking because of the nature of the transactions involved. They note that the bureau's dealings with U.S. Recording were in the area of intelligence, where the law, for reasons of security, allowed FBI officials great latitude in negotiating fees and giving out contracts without competitive bids.

What reportedly does bother many, though, is a feeling that the investigation will turn up a pattern of cronyism and bad judgment that led some officials to use the leeway given them by the law to do favors for their friends.

Whether this will turn out to be the case will not become clear until the investigation is completed. But a great many restive agents are known to feel that a prima facie case already has been established in the public's mind, that it must inevitably reflect on the judgment of many in senior positions and that for the good of the bureau, they must go.

Such sentiment runs

against the grain of Kelley's plans for completing the move away from the Hoover-style FBI through an orderly, gradual succession of management personnel.

In particular, it implies a challenge to the continued tenure of the three men chosen by Kelley as his key aides in carrying out the transformation: Associate Director Nicholas P. Callahan and Deputy Associate Directors James B. Adams and Thomas J. Jenkins.

When Kelley was brought to Washington from the Kansas City police department in 1973 with a mandate to reform the FBI, he quickly decided that it would be impractical and very damaging to morale to purge the bureau immediately of senior executives who had come up during Hoover's 48 years as director.

Instead, he opted for an interim period during which the bureau would be run by men trained in the Hoover school, but with a capacity for change. He chose his men with the idea that they would assist him both in charting the FBI's future direction and preparing a new generation of executives for leadership posts.

In pursuing this plan, Kelley has come to rely very heavily on Callahan, a 62-year-old veteran who stayed on beyond retirement age at Kelley's specific request, and Adams, 49, who oversees day-to-day investigative activities.

Adams, in particular, has emerged as a sort of "crown prince" who would eventually succeed Callahan as the principal deputy and some day perhaps even take over from Kelley as an up-from-the-ranks director.

However, both men were, at early stages of their careers, proteges of Mohr, who retired from the bureau in 1972. Mohr was a favorite of Hoover and Hoover's chief

deputy, Clyde Tolson; and during their final years in power, Mohr virtually ran the FBI.

Even now, there is widespread feeling within the FBI that many of the present top echelon, Adams and Callahan among them, are still his loyalists, and that, through them, Mohr exerts

considerable influence over FBI activities.

These rumors are strongly denied by Kelly and other current FBI officials. And well-placed neutral sources familiar with bureau operations tend to agree that the stories of Mohr influence are a myth — that there is no evidence to support suggestions that Callahan and Adams are not loyal to Kelley or have impeded his efforts to revamp the bureau.

Still, the rumors continue to swirl around the bureau; and they have been especially sensitive by the U.S. Recording question and by the knowledge that Callahan and Adams, apparently through the offices of Mohr, had been poker-playing friends of the electronic firm's president, Tait.

As a result, the agents' ranks currently are buzzing with rumors that Callahan, slated to retire at the end of next year, is likely to leave well before that time. There even is speculation that Adams, who reportedly has had many offers from private industry, also will go.

Many agents concede that the departure of these men, particularly Adams, would be a serious blow to Kelley's authority and prestige. But as one says:

"Both of them came up in the Hoover school, where it was considered perfectly proper to summarily fire a junior agent who got caught drinking coffee at the wrong time. The same rules have to apply to them; and if there's any question about the propriety of their past actions or associations, they should go."

The other big morale problem currently preoccupying Kelley involves the continuing furor over the counter-intelligence programs carried out under Hoover's orders between 1956 and 1971.

Cointelpro, as it was known, was aimed at disrupting militant political groups such as the Communist Party, the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panthers by harassing and discrediting their members. In some instances, the FBI fabricated derogatory information about target individuals and sent it to their families and employers.

Earlier this month, Levi an-

nounced that the Justice Department was instituting a program to notify several hundred persons that they had been Cointelpro targets and advise them that they may obtain further information about their cases if they wish.

Justice Department sources say that this notification program represents "the minimum" that can be done to make amends for illegal FBI acts. Some critics of the bureau, these sources point out, have demanded that FBI agents who took part in Cointelpro activities be prosecuted.

For this reason, Kelley and his top deputies, after

expressing reservations about the propriety of "apologizing" to the Communist Party, are known to have reluctantly endorsed the plan.

However, FBI sources say, it has triggered considerable bitterness and hostility among bureau personnel. In this instance, they add, the criticism comes not from the younger men, who regard Cointelpro as something that happened before their time, but from the veteran agents of the Hoover era.

Some, who took part in Cointelpro activities, fear that they now will be exposed to costly civil law suits from the victims. More importantly, say the sources, there is widespread feeling among older agents that Levi's program puts the FBI in the position of begging forgiveness from Communists and radicals and portraying its agents, many of whom believed that they were faithfully carrying out lawful orders, as criminals.

There are other problems as well. Almost everyone in the FBI is known to be upset by a demand from the White House for big cuts in overtime payments to

members of the federal law enforcement agencies.

Within the FBI, where almost all investigative agents work considerably longer than a 40-hour week, those below a supervisory grade level are compensated with what amount to an annual lump sum payment for all overtime. This figure currently is approximately \$3,700 a year.

To comply with the administration's demand, the bureau has been forced to consider two options. One would pare \$1,000 from the sum paid annually to all eligible agents; the other would continue payment at the same rate to field agents, while taking the entire \$3,700 away from those assigned to headquarters in Washington.

"Neither is exactly calculated to boost morale," notes one concerned FBI official. "If we take the first course, we make everybody unhappy. And, if we go for the second, we seriously impede our ability to recruit promising agents into executive positions. How can you say to a guy, 'We've got a big promotion for you in Washington, but first you have to take a \$3,700 pay cut.?'"